

# Uncle Sam: Detective

By WILLIAM ATHERTON DU PUY

## A Fiasco in Firearms

Copyright by W. G. Chapman

True stories of the Great Federal Detective Agency, the Bureau of Information, U. S. Dep't of Justice.

It is here set down for the first time that Special Agent Billy Gard of the United States department of justice trod the deck of the good German ship Esmeralda and smoked many Mexican cigarettes on that historic morning in April, 1914, when she approached the port of Vera Cruz, loaded to the gunwales with ammunition for the Huertistas, and precipitated the landing of American marines.

Also it is here first told that it was the hand of Billy Gard that lighted the match that ignited the powder that caused the explosion that kept Yankee fighting men in Mexico for many months and the big American sister republics on the verge of war. For the action of the head of the government of a hundred million people, the orders extended to the military, the scuttling of battleships and transports, were based upon mysteriously received messages from this young representative of the United States, who through a combination of chance and design found himself strangely placed in the center of a web of circumstance.

It had all started in a New York hotel six months before. It was not entirely out of keeping with what was to follow that a huge and bewhiskered Russian should have staged the prologue of what was later to assume something of the nature of an international farce. But it was such a man, registering himself as G. Egeoff, pronouncing some of his indifferent English with the explosiveness of Russia and some of it with the lilting softness of Latin America, who created a scene in a Manhattan hotel and thus first introduced the whole matter. He had arrived but a moment before, dusty, disheveled, empty handed. The room clerk had suggested that it was the custom of the hotel that guests without baggage should pay in advance. Then had come the explosion accompanied by oaths in four languages.

The man with the whiskers called upon all to witness that this indignity had been placed upon him, G. Egeoff, the representative of rulers of nations, the bearer of credentials, the possessor of enough money in his one vest pocket to buy the hotel in question and turn it into a barracks for his peons.

Whereupon he produced from the vest pocket in question a draft on the Mexican treasury for the neat sum of three million dollars in gold, signed by none other than Victoriano Huerta himself. At which signal the entire hotel staff salaamated profoundly and the man who swore was escorted to the best suite and the house detective telephoned to the special agents of the department of justice.

Billy Gard was forthwith sent out to determine the legitimacy of the mission of this strange representative of turbulent Mexico.

In three days he knew that Egeoff was in touch with those representatives of the Huerta regime with whom the department of justice was already acquainted and whose activities centered about a certain Mexican boarding house just off Union square. He also knew that the Russian had called upon from his hotel room certain manufacturers of munitions whose factories were in Hartford and that representatives of those firms had visited him.

Gard had drawn the conclusion that the Russian was buying ammunition for the Mexican government. Since the United States was denying clearance to ships with such cargoes destined to either faction to the controversy to the south, it was necessary that all the facts be ascertained.

But it developed that the strong current of the plans of the man from Mexico ran through Valentines, that outfit of revolutionists and dealer in second-hand and out-of-date war material. Valentines based his operations upon the principle that the discarded munitions of progressive nations are plenty good enough for use in Latin America and that the purchase of all such, no matter how antiquated, offered a good opportunity for profit. Hardly a warlike venture in the tumultuous lands to the south has run its course within recent years without leaning heavily upon Valentines.

Knowing this Gard was particularly anxious to find out what was transpiring within when, on a murky Saturday night, he followed the Russian and three of his Mexican associates through the narrow lanes of the lower East side, beneath its changing elevated, and to the side door of Valentines within which they disappeared.

He had previously reconnoitered the surroundings. He knew that Valentines had taken great care in guarding the privacy of his establishment. The dark back room in which his conferences were held had but one entrance which was from the main establishment. The doorway from

which its single window looked faced the wall of a printing house, broken by but three or four small windows as is so often the case with these blank surfaces. Gard had made note of the fact that one of these windows was opposite and above that in the back room of Valentines. He had gained admission to the printing house and had viewed the adjoining premises from this high window.

A single possibility presented itself. This was that Valentines might have his curtain up and that Jane Gates might help with the case.

Jane Gates occupied a warm spot in the hearts of the special agents and they were always particular that when they called upon her there was no possibility of unpleasant experiences, and the way seemed clear here. She was a deaf girl, known among the sense of hearing but mistress of the inestimable difficulties of lip reading and the possessor of the nimblest set of fingers in the world, these latter earning her a place as copyist for the service. Her face was of a cameo beauty, with a touch of pathos because of her isolation. She was the warm spot in the heart of the office but, as its very spirit was the untangling of riddles, she had found opportunity to help in a novel way in several difficult cases through her ability at lip reading.

By prearrangement Jane Gates, on this Saturday night, was awaiting at the office not half a dozen blocks away a possible call from Billy Gard. Barrett had a taxi at the front door and the expected summons brought him to the publishing house in five minutes. Beneath a light in the hall Gard told the deaf girl of the situation, for lip reading needs light. Soon they were in the gloom by the little window and the eager eyes of the Lily Maid were looking into the office opposite where the conference on munitions was going forward. Fortunately Valentines did not speak Spanish and an interpreter was necessary. The face of this man was in plain view not thirty feet away.

Soon Jane Gates was repeating in the peculiar, hollow voice of those who do not hear but have learned to form words with the lips: "Mauser ammunition—old Krupp rapid fire guns—Seventy five—"

Gard stepped beyond the range of view from the opposite window. He turned a pocket flashlight on his own lips.

"Try to find out how they are to be shipped," he instructed.

"Could supply a total amounting to \$750,000 in value," the girl repeated after the interpreter.

"Delivered in thirty days—Brooklyn—how can you get clearance papers?"

"We clear for Odessa," the interpreter's lips said. "The United States must accept our claim of that destination. We know how to evade embargo regulations."

Valentines had been walking nervously about the room. At this moment he approached the window and pulled down the curtain that looked into the courtyard. The work of the lip reader was at an end.

It was a month later when Gard had traced a consignment of ammunition from the factory at Hartford to its place on a Brooklyn pier where it lay ready for shipment. It seemed the last of the American goods that were needed to complete the cargo of the Italian bark, City of Naples, that was ready to sail. It appeared that papers had already been taken out, that the manifests acknowledged the presence of great quantities of war munitions, but that the claim was made that the cargo was bought for South Russian dealers and bound for Odessa.

Gard hurriedly ascertained that the United States would not refuse permission for the ship to sail. It was, however, anxious to keep in touch with its movements. Could the special agent find a way to accompany her? Gard would try.

Half an hour later a young Italian strolled down the pier just as the last of the cargo was being taken aboard the City of Naples. He was dressed in a well-worn, light-checked, somewhat flashy suit, a scarlet vest, a flowing tie. His dark locks breathed forth odors of the lotions of cheap barber shops. He walked nonchalantly aboard the Italian bark and went below.

The vessel was just breaking loose from her moorings when the stowaway was discovered. There had been great haste in her sailing and she was making for the seas two hours ahead of her appointed time. The stowaway surmised that there was every reason why her officers would fear delay and that, if he could remain below decks until she was un-

der way, the vessel would not be stopped to put him ashore.

This was the reason why an unequal fight ensued in which three sailormen sought to drag an unwilling youngster in a plaid suit from the hold to the deck that he might be put off the ship. But the first of the attacking force proved himself unfamiliar with the strategy of a lead with the left to make an opening for a swing with the right, and so this latter blow caught him on the chin and he went down and out. The second sailor was a squarehead and rushed his antagonist. The stowaway ducked and the force of the Swede increased the severity of a mighty jab with the right in the pit of the stomach, which happened at the time to be unusually full, and the attacker crumbled with an agony in his inward.

The stowaway grappled with the third man and showed an additional knowledge of the science of the rough and tumble. He twisted one of that individual's hands behind him and pushed it up, using the favorite jiu jitsu trick that American policemen have borrowed from the Japanese. In this way he had his man at his mercy. "Shades of Carlos!" came a roar from the doorway in most indifferent Spanish. "Where did you learn it all?"

The stowaway looked up and saw the huge form of the bearded Russian who represented the government of Mexico standing there.

"In the United States," he answered in Spanish. "Ah, they are wonderful, those Americans!"

It should be remembered that Billy Gard had lived abroad when a boy with his father who was in the consular service. He had learned the languages of the Mediterranean and



THE SECOND SAILOR WAS A SQUAREHEAD AND RUSHED HIS ANTAGONIST.

most before he spoke English and was therefore much at home among his people. And because of this he had been able to become an Italian stowaway in half an hour at a second-hand store in Brooklyn.

"But why all this fighting?" asked the Russian.

"I would go back to Italy, bon Italy," said the stowaway. "These pigs of sailormen know not how homiesick I am. They would put me ashore. I not go. You see the result."

"Well, you will not be put ashore now," said the Russian. "I happen to be interested in this cargo, and I want no delay. You may come on deck with me."

It happened in this way that Billy Gard went to sea with a large cargo of Mexican ammunition, little believing that it would ever cross to Europe. Since he was aboard and might not be otherwise disposed of, the Italian captain set him to work as a clerk, and got much good service out of him on the ship's books before land was again sighted. It happened in this way, also, that he was given an opportunity to study and cultivate G. Egeoff, but little came of it because of the all-sufficiency of that gentleman within himself.

Gard was greatly surprised when the city of Naples maintained her course straight across the Atlantic. Even more surprised was he when she passed in at Gibraltar, ignored the ports of Spain, sailed past the towns of her nativity in Italy and on to the east. Not until the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus were passed was he convinced that she was bound for the port for which she had cleared. But after six weeks at sea she reached Odessa, on the Black sea, and there put into port.

But at Odessa the unexpected happened. The authorities, being by temperament suspicious and ever-vigilant of anarchistic plots, refused to let the

ship unload her cargo of ammunition. Egeoff stormed and swore and bribed, but all to no avail. The ammunition might not be landed.

Billy Gard managed to get ashore and find his way to the American consulate. From there he was able to make his report to the home office and receive instructions that he was to remain with the ammunition cargo.

The special agent found his task comparatively easy here, and merely had to wait for events to take their normal course. His chief interest was G. Egeoff, who had remained a mystery to him despite a semifriendship that had slowly grown up between them. He had attempted in vain to lead the Russian into a discussion of his future plans in Mexico, and had grown to suspect that the gentleman had no such plans. At Odessa the big man seemed impatient of delay, and Gard thought, rather reckless of the disposition of his charge.

The representative of the United States had been contemplating the value of the guns bought at Valentines and the figure of \$750,000 which the Lily Maid had caught from the lips of the interpreter. He knew that the purchases at Hartford had not exceeded \$100,000. He drew the conclusion that this strange representative of the Indian head of a Latin-American nation would probably give less than value for the \$3,000,000 that had been placed in his hands for the purchase of American munitions of war.

The special agent was still attached to the City of Naples as clerk when, after ten days of futile attempts at landing her cargo, she again turned her nose to the sea. She was two days out when he became assured of a fact which he had suspected. The Russian was not aboard. The ship

Whereupon he presented letters from the Mexican government showing him to be its agent in London. His companion he introduced as Mr. Sanchez, Mexican consul at Hamburg, whereupon the three dropped into Spanish and continued the conversation. Gard presented letters he had found in the ship's office and addressed to these gentlemen. He took it that these letters were from the Mexican consul at Odessa. They evidently asked the men to whom they were addressed to do what they could toward expediting the transshipment of the cargo.

"We have all arrangements made," McKay volunteered. "The Esmeralda will take our stuff aboard immediately and is sailing for Vera Cruz in six days."

"I have had the very devil of a time," said the special agent, introducing the rasp of an occasional Russian consonant into his Spanish as he had heard it done for two months by the man whose role was being thrust upon him. "I want to run over to Warsaw for a few days. Do you not think, gentlemen, that I have earned this brief vacation?"

Whereupon McKay and Sanchez agreed to attend to all details, making it necessary only that the supposed Egeoff should be in Hamburg on the day of sailing. So was Gard relieved of the difficulty and danger of a sustained masquerade and so was he able again to get in touch with America. As a matter of fact he hurried to Paris. There he found Coleman, whom he had known before, in charge of the Paris branch of his own service.

"Dress me up like a white man," he told Coleman. "Lead me up to something that human beings eat. Take me out where I may try the experiment of attempting to be a gentleman again. I am by no means sure I can do it. Four days from now talk to me about cipher messages, but not until then."

But when Gard returned to Hamburg it was understood that he should use the old confederate cipher for any messages that he might be able to send. This is a simple and always efficient cipher made up of a square of the letters of the alphabet. One begins by writing the twenty-six letters in a row, commencing with A. The second line begins with B, placed directly under the A of the first line, and followed by all the letters in order. The third line begins with C, the fourth with D, and so on until Z is reached. Any amateur may build up his square of letters in this way.

There must be a secret key word which is known to the senders and the receivers. The keyword is written out repeatedly and the message is written beneath it. Instead of using the letters of the message, the letters of the keyword are used. This is the first puzzling translation. The message as it then appears is taken to the square of letters. In writing it as it is ultimately to be sent, its letters are found in the top line of the square and also in the perpendicular line that runs down its side. The lines of letters that radiate from these margins, one horizontally and one perpendicularly, meet at some point within the square. The letter upon which they meet is used in the message. No one in the world without his square of letters and without the keyword can read this message.

So the home government was informed that Special Agent William H. Gard might communicate with its ships by means of the confederate cipher and that the keyword, rather strangely, was "Russian whiskers." The home government transmitted this information to its battleships lying off Mexico and their operators were instructed to pick up any wireless that might come to them out of the Atlantic.

Gard hurried back to Hamburg just in time to sail on the Esmeralda. He was not sure but that the big Russian would communicate with the Mexican representatives and, approached the situation he had developed with no little misgiving. It appeared that his conclusion that the Russian had made a getaway with much swag was correct. He was warmly received by both McKay and Sanchez and the ship got away with but one difficulty facing them. The Mexican consul was returning to his native land aboard it.

Gard realized that, as the confidential representative of Huerta, he could not with impunity have anything to do with Sanchez, as that volatile Latin would immediately lead him into much talk of Mexican men and conditions. Gard knew almost nothing about Mexico City and could not even sustain a casual conversation on that subject.

It was because of these considerations that the apparently genial disposition of the supposed purchaser of munitions of war proved a disappointment to Senator Sanchez. This Russian was evidently no sailor. He took to his cabin as soon as the Esmeralda took to sea. His sea manners were also far from Latin for he answered with guttural oaths any inquiries that were made as to the condition of his health. He seemed to have gone on a mad debauch and insisted that a constant procession of highballs be sent to his stateroom. He cut Senator Sanchez dead when he met him on the deck. Caramba! A beast of a man was this, to be shunned as the plague.

The captain and the wireless operator were the only individuals with whom this disagreeable shipmate had anything to do. To the captain it was made plain that a situation existed off Mexico. The ships of those pigs of Americans were blockading Vera Cruz. They might blockade but they had no right to stop a German ship

bound for that port. But he must talk to his principals in Mexico. There was the wireless of the Esmeralda, and there was his secret cipher which no Yankee could read. Might the operator handle his messages?

To be sure. The representative of the Mexican government which was to pay handsomely for the transportation of the cargo aboard the Esmeralda might do entirely as he wished.

So it transpired that Special Agent Billy Gard began talking to the American battleships in southern seas when the Esmeralda was not much more than half-way across the Atlantic. He amused himself writing messages much as a man passes the time of a voyage in playing solitaire. So it happened that the United States government had all the details of the approach of a shipload of ammunition of American origin destined to Huerta, upon whom the screws were just then being put for insulting the Stars and Stripes. So it was evident that if this ammunition were allowed to land, it might be used against American troops, who were at any moment to be thrown into Mexico.

Yet the United States might not prevent a German ship from entering the harbor at Vera Cruz. The only method of stopping that ammunition was to seize the port and custom house and thereby come into possession of the cargo if it were disembarked.

The wireless of the Esmeralda sputtered out a message which, when interpreted in accordance with the confederate cipher and the keyword of "Russian whiskers," conveyed the information that the vessel was approaching the Mexican coast and that her intention was to steam under the very noses of the American dreadnaughts into port. The facts were reported to Washington, where the alternative of seizing the port was sternly faced. Orders were given to act.

The next day American marines went, some to glory and some to death, past that most tragic spot in all America, the fortress prison of San Juan de Ulloa; into those streets frequented by the sacred scavenger bazaar of the Aztecs; beneath the walls of the ancient parochial church beside the Plaza de la Constitucion where the first American boy was destined to die at the hands of a sniping greaser; into the gate city that had known Cortez and Maximilian, and had loaded the galleons of Spain with more silver and gold than had ever before been amassed anywhere in the history of the world.

But the Esmeralda did not come in to discharge her ammunition that it might fall into the hands of the Americans. Instead, it haunted Mexican waters for a while as a creature of unrest, uncertain where to land. Finally it put into Mobile, where its captain was left at a still greater loss, for the supposed Mexican gun-runner went ashore and was seen no more. Sanchez, the Mexican consul, left by train for his native land. Huerta, in the madness of his career, extended no instructions.

The ultimate disposition of the Esmeralda's cargo completes the record of another of those fiascos in the game of pandering to revolutionists in Latin America. The outcast cargo knocked about the Caribbean for awhile like a party dressed up and no place to go. The constitutionalists came into possession of Tampico and sought a way to deal with the captain of the Esmeralda, who was still unpaid for transporting his cargo and willing to listen to almost any proposition. But the constitutionalists bought no pigs in pokes and insisted on an examination of the cargo. Probably they had themselves bought of Valentines and knew the nature of his stock in trade. They found a way to open some of the boxes and there discovered such an array of antique armament that even they scorned its use. Valentines and the Russian who came to New York to buy for Huerta had taken no pains to give that warlike gentleman even the value of a portion of his money.

**Two Classes of People.** Probably the recording angel never quite loves patience with a man who is kind to animals. One may swear, steel, lie, cheat, get drunk or run over strangers in one's motor car; one may be shiftless, crabbed, haughty, narrow-minded, thick-skulled and insubordinate, and yet have a spark of nobility which expresses itself in kindness to horses and to stray cats and dogs. A man who isn't needlessly cruel can get along even if he lacks some of the pretensions virtues.

The reason that kindness to animals is a sure test of a person's character is that animals are generally helpless, as compared with human beings, and don't do anything to arouse jealousy. Men who are naturally kind may take merciless advantages with the happiness of others who stand in their way. But men who are naturally kind don't kick stray dogs.

In fact, there are just two classes of people in the world, one with imagination enough to know how a dog feels when it shrinks along beside you, and wags its forlorn tail and hopes against hope that it has found a friend at last, and one which hasn't that faculty.—San Francisco Bulletin.

**Couldn't Guess.** "What do you suppose will happen to the map of Europe when the war is over?"

"Don't ask me. I never was any good at those jig-saw puzzles."

**Up Against It.** "After all, it's no crime to be poor." "Maybe not, but no poor man can afford to hire a lawyer to prove that it isn't."

## ALL READY



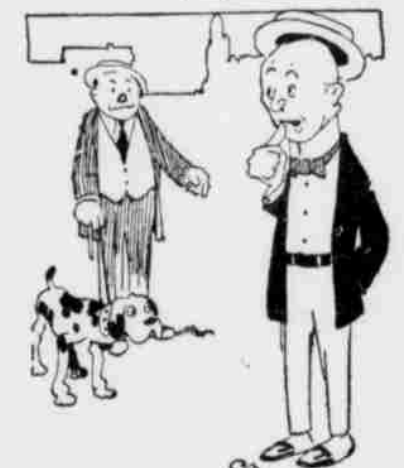
He—I suppose I am expected at your house tonight?  
Lilly—I guess so. I saw his gettin' de cozy corner in order and dad just unchained de dog.

## NOT NECESSARY



Dobbs—Your boy is trying to write poetry, you say?  
Hobbs—Yes.  
Dobbs—Why don't you discourage him?  
Hobbs—The editors will soon do that.

## TAKING CHANCES



Mr. Borely—Is there any danger of that dog biting me?  
Bobby Josh—Well, he might; the man I got him from said he was a bore hound.

## SLIGHTLY PARTICULAR



"She can swear like a pirate."  
"It's shocking, but you should say 'like a piratesse.'"

## PROMPT DENIAL



The Detective—Oh! you're cooked for this robbery all right. You left a strong clue behind you.  
The Prisoner—Dat's a lie. De only strong tool I had wid me wuz a jimmy, an' I took dat away wid me.

**Information Wanted.** Little Lemuel—Say, paw, this book! says nature never wastes anything.  
Paw—I guess that's right, son.  
Little Lemuel—Then what's the use of a cow having two horns when she can't even play on one?